

VZCZCXYZ0003
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHYN #0271 0421407
ZNR UUUUU ZZH (CCY ADX 2D8431/WSC5070)
R 111407Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY SANAA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1179
INFO RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 1593
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH 0421

UNCLAS SANAA 000271

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD AND DRL JBARGHOUT
JEDDAH FOR JLIVINGSTON

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDED SBU CAPTIONS)

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [KTIP](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: YEMENIS THINK SAUDI ARABIA COULD DO MORE TO STOP
SMUGGLING OF CHILDREN

REF: SANAA 00215

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. ROYG officials and independent experts repeatedly express frustration with the lack of Saudi cooperation on trafficking-in-persons issues, including children smuggled to Saudi Arabia for work and Saudi "sex tourists" who frequent underage prostitutes in Yemen. They allege that the Saudi government has significantly stalled bilateral efforts to combat trafficking. Without higher-level Saudi commitment, it will continue to be difficult for impecunious Yemen to fight this cross-border problem alone. END SUMMARY.

THE TIME BOMB

¶2. (SBU) "They call us a time bomb," Lamia al-Eryani of the Shawthab Foundation for child rights told PolOff on January 31, "and yet they could be doing much more to help." Thousands of Yemeni children travel illegally across the porous border to Saudi Arabia each year, where they face abuse and harsh living conditions (reftel). Since 2005, the ROYG has viewed child trafficking as a significant social problem, and has slowly made efforts to combat it. But according to experts in Yemen, the ROYG has not found a similar commitment across the border. The two nations formed a Joint Committee on Child Trafficking in 2005, but while Yemeni members included cabinet-level officials, the appointed Saudis were low-ranking bureaucrats under the Ministry of Education, according to Abdullah al-Khamissy, a child trafficking expert at the Higher Council on Motherhood and Childhood (HCMC). When it came time to sign a joint Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in October 2007, the Saudis said they didn't have the authority, and the document was never signed. UNICEF's Chief of Child Protection Judith Leveilee told PolOff that the Joint Committee has not met since that time. Khamissy told PolOff on February 8 that the Saudis were stalling on appointing higher-level officials to work on the issue, and on initiating a joint study on child trafficking. "We don't want money," Khamissy said, although with less than \$5,000 earmarked for child trafficking programs in FY2009, the ROYG faces significant resource problems in combating trafficking.

¶3. (SBU) Small steps have been made in Saudi methods of incarcerating and deporting Yemeni children. UNICEF's Leveilee said that the Saudis deport hundreds of illegal Yemeni migrants every day, among them an unknown number of children. According to Eryani of Shawthab Foundation, Saudi authorities used to jail children with adults and even beheaded minors illegally in Saudi Arabia. She said that in 2008, the Saudis began immediately deporting children to Yemen, rather than detaining them in Saudi Arabia.

SEX SELLS

14. (SBU) An unaddressed problem in both Saudi Arabia and Yemen is the sex trade, which often involves underage girls. Sex tourists from the Gulf are an open secret in Yemen, where underage prostitutes work out of hotels in major cities across the country, according to contacts at Shawthab Foundation, local NGO Seyaj and UNICEF. Ahmed Al-Quraishi of SEYAJ, an organization that promotes children's rights, told PolOff on February 1 that Saudi men travel to Yemen to arrange liaisons with underage prostitutes, sometimes in the form of "temporary marriages." He said he knew of at least three cases where Saudi nationals "married" underage Yemeni girls, only to force them into prostitution in Saudi Arabia. Al-Quraishi said that hotels throughout Yemen cater to these sex tourists, and even arrange trips to rural villages for similar liaisons.

COMMENT

15. (SBU) Yemen has begun to live up to its TIP-related responsibilities; a strong partner to the north will be an important asset as it continues to do so. END COMMENT.

SECHE